

Joint Meeting, Shutesbury Finance Committee, Select Board and School Committee
Saturday, December 17, 2022 Virtual (Zoom) Meeting

Finance Committee Present: Ajay Khashu, Bob Groves, Jim Hemingway, Susie Mosher, Jim Walton, George Arvanitis - Absent: Melody Chartier

Select Board present: Melissa Makepeace O'Neil, Eric Stocker - Absent: Rita Farrell

School Committee present: Dan Hayes, Julie Martel, Steve Sullivan - Absent: Jen Taylor, Bethany Rose, ex-officio member, Town Administrator Becky Torres

Meeting convened at 8:30 am

We received the information slides from the region with a list of expense and revenue projections, a draft of the FY24 budget with and without the 4% increases cap for guardrails and capital debt projections.

This early draft shows a 2.5% budget increase over FY23. Shutesbury's increase is projected at .31% Without guardrails this budget would increase the assessments to Pelham and Leverett by more than 4%. On this document, the guardrail concept proposes further cutting the budget by \$37k so no town has an increase greater than 4%.

Some people have continuing concern that the guardrails could adversely affect towns if the 4% cap was met by increasing the assessment to other towns, as was done in FY23. Others point to last year's step as a one-time strategy that smoothed the way for agreement on full 100% statutory method with a five-year rolling average. Shutesbury's work to move to this assessment method has been accomplished. We will see what the region proposes vis-à-vis the guardrails for FY24. Preserving the new assessment method is paramount.

The track project was not on the agenda. The next decision point will be reached on January 16 which is the deadline for the private fundraising to reach its \$1m goal. Shutesbury's CPC received the request for CPA funds and the committee agreed that the project is eligible. Our CPC process will finish up at ATM.

There was a question raised – Is the \$1.5m authorization for the track in the capital debt schedule?

Other track comments were: Pelham CPC turned down the project. The letter from Mike Morris, ARPS Superintendent, said the demand on playing fields cannot keep up with the natural grass fields available. Rebuilding natural turf to meet the needs of the school would take hiring additional DPW staff, adding more fields, using more water, and time for the fields to grow and recover each season. There is maintenance for synthetic turf, but not as much as natural turf. Health and safety for students is a key concern.

We adjourned at 9 am to join the Four Town meeting.